In the Mood For Doing Good? How Affective States and Benefit Types Influence Consumers’ Decision Making With Regards to Sustainable Products

Verena Gruber, WU Vienna, Austria

By means of three experimental studies, we show how affective states and appeal types influence individuals' decision-making with regards to sustainable products. While a happy affective state is particularly helpful in stimulating individuals to make other-centered decisions, they are more generous in their willingness-to-pay in a sad affective state.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1017602/volumes/v42/NA-42

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
In the Mood for Doing Good? How Affective States and Benefit Types Influence Consumers’ Decision Making with Regards to Sustainable Products

Verena Gruber, WU Vienna, Austria

EXTENDED ABSTRACT:

Resource-intensive lifestyles in industrialized countries are closely linked to adverse ecological and societal outcomes; and a shift to more sustainable consumption patterns has been suggested as potential remedy. Sustainable products can either be presented as entailing a self-benefit appeal (the main beneficiary is oneself) or an other-benefit appeal (the main beneficiary is someone else) (Fisher, et. al. 2008). If consumers are to be motivated to buy sustainable products, which appeal type is more likely to stimulate a positive decision? Furthermore, how does the decision between appeal types depend on the affective state of consumers? After all, extant research has shown that altruistic decisions, i.e. helping others, can improve individual’s moods.

This paper reports the results of two laboratory experiments in which mood is manipulated by means of autobiographical recall and appeal type by means of different product descriptions (focusing either on “doing something good for oneself” vs. “helping others”). The 2 (mood: happy vs. sad) x 2 (appeal type: self vs. other) between-subject design is first used to test individuals’ decisions between a Fair Trade (FT – other-benefit appeal) and an organic (self-benefit appeal) smoothie; and in consequence between two description of a coffee (which combines both attributes but particularly stresses either self- or other-benefit). In both experiments, respondents’ WtB is measured as well as their WtP (for a 250ml smoothie bottle and a 500g coffee bag respectively) and results are ambiguous: in the case of the smoothie, a happy affective state significantly increases both WtB and WtP if an other-centered benefit is promoted. In the case of the coffee, a sad affective state and a self-benefit appeal significantly increase consumers’ decision to buy the product, but when it comes to their WtP, the other-benefit yields significantly higher euro amounts. In conclusion it seems as if business or non-profits interested in consumers’ willingness to pay a premium should opt for messages entailing a negative affective appeal.

Subsequently, a two-week long field experiment is conducted in a campus café (selling a self-roasted coffee blend which is both organic and FT certified) and affective state is manipulated by means of music. Consumers are randomly assigned to either the control condition (no specific question), the other-condition (question whether they prefer house blend or FT coffee) or the self-benefit condition (question whether they want house blend or organic coffee). While mood has a slight but non-significant influence on decision-making, presenting the coffee as Fair Trade led to significantly more choices than if presented as organic. This is particularly true for days with sad music, providing support of the Negative State Relief Model (Cialdini et. al. 1987).

REFERENCES:
